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To Ned and Betty Crossett
with the warm regards of the author

December 1914

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SONNETS OF
A PORTRAIT-PAINTER

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SONNETS OF A PORTRAIT-PAINTER

By
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Mitchell Kennerley
1914

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SONNETS OF
A PORTRAIT-PAINTER

I

EAR fellow-actor of this little stage,
We play the hackneyed parts right merrily,—
Trifle with words drawn from the poet's page,
And match our skill with cool and conscious eye.
All gracious gestures of each shining rôle
Have been the garments of our summer sport. . . .
But now, when ominous thunders shake my soul,
My reason gives of us no high report. . . .
I could not mimic Romeo had I lain
By Juliet's bier in bitter dizzy truth.
Henceforth my mouthings, choked, inept, and vain,
Will lack the light touch fitting amorous youth.
Let fall the mask! Let end the tinselled play!
Ghastly the footlights front this sudden day.

II

It needs no maxims drawn from Socrates
To tell me this is madness in my blood.
Nor does what wisdom I have learned from these
Serve to abate my most unreasoned mood.
What would I of you? What gift could you bring,
That to await you in the common street
Sets all my secret ecstasy a-wing
Into wild regions of sublime retreat?
And if you come, you will speak common words,
Smiling as quite ten thousand others smile—
And I, poor fool, shall thrill with ghostly chords,
And with a dream my sober sense beguile.
And yet, being mad, I am not mad alone:
Alight you come! . . . That folly dwarfs my own.

III

Hell's self shall mock a brain that daily smears
Canvases thus in vision-tortured strife
To draw some beauty from the bitter years
And cast some glow on man's misshapen life,—
And then, a-sudden, he who thought to give
His forms a beauty alien to man's clay,
Finds in one form that seems to breathe and live
Such fairness that he throws his brush away!
The recreant priest may some day be forgiven;
The soldier who has fled yet hopes to win;
The rich man shall perchance creep into heaven;
Tannhäuser still may purge him of his sin:—
But I misdoubt if any blossoms start
On his dead staff who has betrayed his art.

IV

A thousand walls immure your days,—and yet
What are they all when, of the thousand, one
Has fallen beneath the curious urge and fret
Of you toward me, of me toward you begun?
When the first fell, I shuddered half-aghast;
The second, now a-crumble in my sight,
Predicts less thunder than the fall late past;
And I await the third with clear delight.
Mingled with all the phantoms of my fear
Are lights of utter lure. Wherefore I choose
To linger watching, though right well I bear
Knowledge that naught's to gain and much to lose,—
And that there is reserved Hell's choicest flame
For pairs of fools who play this silly game.

V

Fate, with devoted and incessant care,
Has showered grotesqueness round us day by day.
If we turn grave, a hurdy-gurdy's air
Is sure to rasp across the words we say.
If we stand tense on brink of perilous choices,
'Tis never where Miltonic headlands loom,
But mid the sound of comic-opera voices
Or the cheap blaze of some hair-dresser's room.
Heaven knows what moonlit turrets, hazed in bliss,
Saw Launcelot and night and Guinevere!
I only know our first impassioned kiss
Was in your cellar, rummaging for beer. . . .
The Sea-born One must hate us: but the Troll
Of modern life acclaims us from his soul!

VI

Why deck yourself with such unholy art
When none of all this beauty is for me?
I have two eyes; also, a living heart
That takes some impress from the things I see.
Wherefore, I say, this cruelty to-night?—
When you came forth in low-cut sweeping dress,
With flaming lips, pale shoulders, eyes alight,—
A cry of youth, a lamp of loveliness!
O what an evil in you has its nest
That my poor writhings should assuage your will!
A serpent coils within your warm white breast
And sucks the nectar of this flower of ill.
Yet . . . when I come, meet me, as thus to-night,—
With flaming lips, pale shoulders, eyes alight!

VII

I sometimes wonder if you did not choose
Which, of the many an uncommingling state
Of man-and-woman love, you best could lose,—
And hold the choice wisely inviolate?
Perhaps you said—"Life, with its myriad jars,
Would wreck us, linked together, into dust.
Nor grow we any nearer to the stars
By the high constancy of sundered trust.
Wherefore, instead of separate deathless faith,—
Instead of bursts of amorous pulsing strife,—
Instead of friendship, that poor maskèd wraith,—
Instead of the magnificence of joined life,—
Let this man give me, be it boon or curse,
Love's restless glances,—and a little verse."

VIII

"Farewell! thou are too dear for my possessing!"
How could he know, who thus consenting sung,
Of the white beauties, the shot gloom oppressing
Cloudlike my heart and tempestlike my tongue!
For he sang love when you were uncreate;
Nor all his skill could pass the shore of birth
To prophesy you, come a wanderer late,
Walking in new and starry fire the earth.
Sublime his power, who could such fairness mould
Without this pattern set before his eye!
His song pours sunward: mine, alternate cold
And flame shake till its chant becomes a cry!
Yet had he seen,—then too his subtle art
Had crashed beneath the whirlwinds of my heart!

IX

Your beauty is as timeless as the earth;
All storied women meet rebloomed in you:—
Yet with some element of later birth,
Some savor strange, some light troubling and new.
You were not possible until to-day;
For in your soul the risen Celtic wind
Breathes audible; and tragic shadows grey
From dark Norwegian winters tinge your mind.
The longing of young painters who have been
Lemans of beauty, and grown faint thereby,—
The fierce unrest of toilers who have seen
Life as a cage of steam-shot agony,—
All weave around you, in the burning Now,
A lure undreamed on Helen's Phidian brow.

X

Come forth! for Spring is singing in the boughs
Of every white and tremulous apple-tree.
This is the season of eternal vows;
Yet what are vows that they should solace me?
For on the winds wild loveliness is crying,
And in all flowers wild joy its present worth
Proclaims, as from the dying to the dying—
"Seize, clasp thy hour of sun upon the earth!"
O never dream that fire or beauty stays
More than one April moment in its flight
Toward regions where the sea-drift of all days
Sinks in a vast, desireless, lonely night.
Away with eternal vows!—and give me breath
Of one white hour here on the marge of death!

XI

Did not each poet amorous of old
Plead the sweet pretext of the wingèd time
To urge his lady that she be not cold
To the dissolving master of that rhyme?
I with no new importunings address
One not less proud and beautiful than they
Whose lovers breathed—"Fleet is thy loveliness;
Let not its treasure slip unused away."
Light hearts! Light words! Here in my transient
Spring
Let them suffice to hide the things unsaid.
No shadow from the lonely deeps I bring.
Nay, I with gayest flowers will wreathe your head.
Here in the sun I put apart from me
Cassandra, Helen, and Persephone.

XII

Take you my brushes, child of light, and lay
Your colors on the canvas as you choose:—
Paint me the soft glow of this crystal day;
My harder touch would grasp them but to lose
The rose-hung veils, the liquid golden flood,—
I who with palette-knife must pry and strain
To wrench from attitude, face, figure, mood,
A living soul and limn its riddle plain.
What need you teachings of my labored art?
The brush will serve your April winsomeness.
Yet . . . rather lay your head upon my heart—
Draw me to you in a supreme caress,—
That one day, as I paint some throat or hair,
Spring's whole delight bloom like a marvel there!

XIII

I am in love with high far-seeing places
That look on plains half-sunlight and half-storm,—
In love with hours when from the circling faces
Veils pass, and laughing fellowship glows warm.
You who look on me with grave eyes where rapture
And April love of living burn confessed,—
The Gods are good! The world lies free to capture!
Life has no walls. O take me to your breast!
Take me,—be with me for a moment's span!—
I am in love with all unveilèd faces.
I seek the wonder at the heart of man;
I would go up to the far-seeing places.
While youth is ours, turn toward me for a space
The marvel of your rapture-lighted face!

XIV

Joy, like a faun, her beautiful young head
Lifted from out the couches of the grass
Where, but a moment since, pursued you fled;
And smiled to hear your tripping footfall pass.
For two passed by,—into the meadows gleaming
With evening light across an amber stream.
O Sweet! I marvel now, with all our dreaming,
To find the sweetness sweeter than our dream.
Now we return; and Joy amid her grasses
Follows our steps with soft and curious eyes,
Smiling to see, as your light figure passes,
Your hand that in my hand so quiet lies.
Wide laughing light across the fields is shed. . . .
Gravely Joy bends her beautiful young head.

XV

I have seen beauties where light stabs the hills
Gold-shafted through a cloud of rosy stain.
I have known splendor where the summer spills
Its tropic wildness of torrential rain.
I have felt all the free young dominance
Of winds that walk the mountains in delight
To tear the tree-trunks from their rooted stance
And make the gorges thunderous of their might.
The light, the torrents, and the winds, in you
I thought I had perceived to kinship grown.
It was a dream. Until this hour, I knew
Nothing—nay, nothing all my days have known
Where beauty, splendor, freedom, held such part
As when you came,—and swept me to your heart.

XVI

It was the night, the night of all my dreams.
Across the lofty spaces of that room
You stole; and where the moonlight's silver streams
Cloudily slanted in upon the gloom,
More silver radiance met them where you moved;
And all the beauty of that hazèd west,
Wherein the moon was sinking, lay approved
Because thus lay your pale, slow-curving breast.
I shall remember,—aye, when death must cover
My soul and body with its rayless tide,—
The madness and the peace of that wild lover
Drunken with life's whole wonder at your side.
I shall remember in life's stormiest deep,—
Even as that night I knew you there in sleep.

XVII

O rare and holy, O taper lit for me
Before vast altars in the lonely dark,—
Without your gleam, dim were my soul to see
Where in star-spaces, imperial and stark
And sacrosanct, his ancient thronèd reign
God holds o'er stars and swallows as of yore;
Up through his Gothic vault I yearned in vain
And turned back baffled from him evermore.
In secular joys I must interpret heaven;
In ecstasies profane I must embrace
His glory,—seek in revels lightning-riven
All I shall ever witness of his face,—
And in wild flight, with passion winged and shod,
Circle and beat the citadel of God.

XVIII

The entrails of a cat,—some rusty wood,—
Certain pegs, pins, in curious manner bent,—
These yield the spirit in its singing mood
The one supreme heaven-scaling instrument.
And I, who rate man's clay not overmuch,
Marvel not more when from the bow-swept strings
Celestial music soars, than when we touch
From mortal flesh strains of immortal things.
To worlds beyond the world of its resort
The viol uplifts its ecstasy or despair.—
O love, who knows what white Hyperian court
Welcomes our spirits, through the cloven air
Rising, beyond the instrument set free
On the wild wings of loosened melody?

XIX

Strange! to remember that I late was fain
To yield death back my poor undated lease,
So wearied had I at life's gate in vain
Asked wonders, and been doled not even peace.
I had grown sceptic of the exalted will
That wins not ever nearer to its aim.
Grey seemed all lures, all calling voices still;
Rest only seemed salvation . . . Then you came
And filled my dusk with stars. I understood
At last what coward languor had been mine.
And as your sweetness stung my brain and blood
Like the wild rapture of some wingèd wine
I stormed the gates that crusts to beggars give!
Life decks its halls for him who dares to live. . . .

XX

Ah, life is good! And good thus to behold
From far horizons where their tents are furled
The mighty storms of Being rise, unfold,
Mix, strike, and crash across a shaken world:—
Good to behold their trailing rearguards pass,
And feel the sun renewed its sweetness send
Down to the sparkling leaf-blades of the grass,
And watch the drops fall where the branches bend.
I think to-day I almost were content
To hear some bard life's epic story tell,—
To view the stage through some small curtain-rent,
Mere watcher at this gorgeous spectacle.
But now the curtain lifts:—my soul's swift powers
Rise robed and crowned—for lo! the play is ours!

XXI

To-day, grown rich with what I late have won,
Across the dusk I reach my hand to you.
Cold as a leaf long pillowed on a stone
Your hand takes mine, like something strange and new.
So soon grown careless? . . . No, for in your eyes
A tenderness still lives, half-shy, half-bold . . .
Then sudden wisdom to my trouble cries:
I know you still my love, but not the old.
That which I loved and won now all is gone;
She was an hour, a moment, a swift mood,—
Vanished forever into deeps unknown,—
And a new creature rules your brain and blood.
Yesterday you were mine, beloved and fair;
To-day I seek,—another love is there.

XXII

I see the days stretch out in wavering line
Toward that sure day when we shall lie in mould.
What fate, I wonder, sordid or divine,
Within their close-shut hands for us they hold?
We have walked with the winds in chasmy places,
And been as birds down sea-born tempests flung,—
Seen joy and wonder on each other's faces,
And learned that life is maddening still, and young.
Will the slow days cancel,—or reconcile,—
These with more sober meanings that they bring?
Shall we part bitter, or with humorous smile,
Or with heart-rent tragic remembering?—
Or sink in friendship, each a tired guest
Who finds the dreamless fireside-slumber best?

XXIII

There stretch between us wonder-woven bonds,
Fine as a thread but strong as braided steel,—
A link that to each changing need responds,
Nor binds the butterfly upon the wheel.
For the coarse bondage sanctioned of men's law
I would not, though I could, these gossamers change,—
Give time and circumstance that leave to draw
Closer the net till nearness must estrange!
And yet a longing restless in me burns
To lock what never might the lock endure:—
As a glad sailor, sea-impassioned, yearns
That what he loves for being unsure, were sure,—
That the fierce doubtful splendor of bright foam
Might somehow, fierce and doubtful, light him home.

XXIV

Now jewelled, alight, you lead the midnight dances.
A thousand eyes, a hundred hearts are yours.
In the great hall, the splendor of your glances
With beauty's secret promise lights and lures.
They flock to you; you smile; they press around you
And crave your favors each with satyr smile.
Does your look lie, or do they truly sound you
With flatteries that your warming heart beguile?
See—the low, lustful, thinly-maskèd faces!
They crowd about you, drinking in your bloom.
In fancy, each a taxi calls, and races
With you to his own Sybaritic room. . . .
I sit alone beneath my desk-lamp's glare,
Cursing the fate that made you mine, and fair.

XXV

You are unworthy any man's desires.
I do suspect you of a thousand ills—
For little moths setting your little fires—
Haughty to high, servient to baser wills.
Rank! that the meanest prancer in your train
Can stir with languid love of lure your mood.
Is it your weak pleasure, or his weaker pain,
That gives sweet sustenance in this poor food?
You have seen visions of high luminous dawn
Coming to work a miracle in your heart:—
But now are veils across your watching drawn
Lest faith in viewless wonders plague your art. . . .
This light vain woman! What fit lash it were
Could I reveal the dream I held of her!

XXVI

What is he but a common gutter-cur,
A chattering mountebank, obese and base?
And yet perhaps your judgment may prefer
His grinning to my thin and furrowed face.
My rival! . . . Faugh! the word burns on my lips,
Acknowledging equality, in that breath,
With him who is my equal but where slips
All form from life, and men are one in death.
He is with you now:—what words now from him fall?
What answering smile lights your alluring eyes?
Madness leers at me, as my thoughts recall
The love that late between us cried,—and cries! . . .
Well, go! My mirth goes with you, who might be
A lamp of earth, a bright star from the sea.

XXVII

Over profoundest deeps, light lacy foam
Plays where the sun-world frontiers meet the sea's.
And in the deeps, slow gulf-tides have their home,
Nor is the foam-crest utterant of these.
Sail the bright surface on a Summer's day,
And you shall dream along each smiling crest,
Making the waves companions of your play,
Blind to the glooms within the ocean's breast.
But when grey weather muffles up the blue,
And thundering voices rise from hollow deeps,
And coldly drooping wraith-mist out of view
Inviolate the ancient mystery keeps,—
Then would you know the secret ocean-world,
Then dive!—a plummet through vast shadows hurled.

XXVIII

You are not peace, you are not happiness;
I look not on you with content or trust;
Nor is there in you aught with power to bless
Or heal my spirit weary of life's dust.
Nay, you are that which, on a leaden day,
As endless clouds sluggish with rain pass by,
Leaps brilliant once across the sullen grey,
A vivid lightning-gleam in that dead sky.
And I, whose days of sun or cloud have grown
Changelessly furled in one grey monstrous pall,—
I thirst for fierce lights, triumphs, trumpets blown,
And you, most wild and passionate of all,—
You, the bright madness lightening the curse
Of reason's dull reign in the universe.

XXIX

In the fair picture of my life's estate
Which long ago my yearning fancy drew
From hints of poets, prophets, lords of fate,
What place is there, belovèd one, for you?
How in this edifice of the soaring dome,
Noble, harmonious, lifted toward the stars,
Shall I carve forth a niche to be the home
Of you and of my love that round you wars?
Ah, folly his, who builds him such a house
Too early, by impatient visions led,
Ere he can know what blood shall stain his brows,
And from what troubled streams his heart is fed.
Now must he labor, in late night, alone
To wreck,—and then rebuild it, stone by stone.

XXX

You mean, my friend, you do not greatly care
For these harsh portraits I have lately done?
You like my old style better,—like the rare
Enamelled softness of that princess-one?
True, this old woman, with the sunken throat
Painted like cordage, is not sweet to view.
Perhaps the blear whites of her eyes connote
No element of loveliness to you.
Ah yes, we all must love the sapphire lake,
The rainbow, and the rose,—but these alone?
Or is there some slight wonder where pines shake
On bare-ribbed mountain-peaks of shattered stone?
So these disturb? I fear this is the end
Of days when I shall please your taste, my friend.

XXXI

Strange modern world wherein our days are passed,—
Perplexed with all its riches,—stung by greed
For what it scarce can use,—restless where vast
Its domination cloaks a bitter need!—
What warring powers have here their tourney spread,
Wherein each sundered destiny must wage
Its own internal struggle, while each head
Bleeds in the general battle of the age!
And over all the seething, where the powers
Storm on their prisons,—where the unborn breaks
Its shell,—where crash the rending moulding hours,
And nations reel, and every bosom shakes,—
Rises, a spectre on this field of strife,
Its faltering, fierce, unconquered will to life!

XXXII

"Are you the same? You love me as of old?"
Lady, my love has turned from you no jot.
"Why lie to me? Your lip curls strangely cold."
Lady, I tell you all. My love has not
Abated by one hair's-breadth: but to-day
The world seems not so worthy of my hate;
And in life's dusty whirl of earthquake-play
A fairness glimmers that I saw not late.
Therefore to me, this day, you are not all;
Hopes and desires, in tumult long repressed,
Unto my ears send an articulate call,
And faith in living rules once more my breast.
"How interesting is life!—when love grows cold.
Beware if ever you love me as of old!" . . .

XXXIII

To-day put by the tumult of our wars,
Where,—strangely sexless in that struggle,—vie
Our spirits, meeting mid the armored jars,
Eager to thwart, to torture, to defy.
Our souls were born for hostile dalliance.
And you, if onslaught of your malice fail,
Abase yourself, fain in my wounded glance
To read exultant that your stings prevail.
And yet, to-day, bar me not from my own.
Lo! I yield all surrender that is yours.
For we are weary; and, each one alone,
We front a world whose loneliness endures.
And there seem hours when o'er an evening deep
We might drift home . . . I knew not you could
weep!

XXXIV

I have not brought you asphodel, or laid
Before you any pearl of happy prize.
We have been as great eagles, unafraid
Circling and grappling through tremendous skies.
But evening closes; and the tired wing
Slants downward in slow earth-approaching flight.
Over the regions of our voyaging
Are drawn the holy curtains of the night.
O weary one! O pitiful waif of space!
Here gleams the haven to our troubled quest;
This is the land sought of your yearning face;
This is the house dreamed of my lonely breast.
We who have known all agonies and all bliss,—
Can it then be we shall know happiness?

XXXV

Now, O belovèd, in this pausing hour
When peace, like a great river's twilight flow,
Isles us about from every alien power,
And all that hearts can know at last we know, —
Now let me speak words that within my breast
Have long, too long, dim to your passing view
Lain darkling, by a thousand storms oppressed,—
Now let me speak my holy love of you.
The topless peaks, the pure unclouded skies
That dwell remote within your spirit furled
I have not sung; and yet they filled my eyes,
Or how else had I sought you through the world?
My humors and my madness, fierce or cold,
I have told you all: my love I have not told.

XXXVI

Fields far below us,—silence in the wood,—
Gold slanting rays down through green branches shed,—
You, clear against the hazy golden flood,—
And in your voice the summer as you said:
"I loved you once because a dream had come
Of what you might be,—and that was not you.
And once I hated, since my heart was numb
With pain to know my perfect hope untrue.
And once to make you other than you were
I would have mounted Calvary on bent knees.
But now,—dear lover whom such tempests stir,—
I am forever done with all of these.
My love is yours:—be tender, fierce, or strange,—
You still are you, unchanged through every change."

XXXVII

Through vales of Thrace, Peneus' stream is flowing
Past legend-peopled hillsides to the deep;
From Pæstum's rose-hung plains soft winds are blowing;
The halls of Amber lie in haunted sleep;
The Cornish sea is silent with the Summer
That once bore Iseult from the Irish shore;
And lovely lone Fiesole is dumber
Than when Lorenzo's garland-guests it wore.
This eve for us the emerald clearness glowing
Over the stream, where late was ruddy might,
Whispers a wonder, dumb to other knowing,—
Known but to you, the silence, and the night.
Our boat drifts breathless the last light is dying;
Stars, dawn, shall find us here together lying.

XXXVIII

Low suns and moons, long days and spacious nights,
With majesty move by us; and in state,
Like buskined actors treading tragic heights,
Enlarge the measure of our common fate.
Across the great gold-hazèd afternoon
Drifts deeper meaning than our thought can prove;
And happy dusks and happy dawns too soon
Beyond our sight in calm procession move.
Dear, hospitable, grows the murmuring earth;
As lords at home,—masters returned from wars,—
Rule we this realm whose summer-thronèd worth
Admits no craving for the distant stars.
Close suns and moons, wide nights and spacious
days,—
The Gods once sojourned in these earthly ways!

XXXIX

I held no trust in this, that it should last!
Of no malignant fates stand I the sport.
If any memory plague me with the past,
I of most clear foreknowledge make retort.
What are the powers that in earth's centre live
That such a dream as ours they should permit?
Why, Heaven itself would have no more to give
If Hell allow we should not wake from it!
Dreaming, I saw beyond the curtained dream,—
Half-conscious ever of the stubborn day
Waiting to smite our turrets, high a-gleam,
With armored siege of hurtling ray on ray.—
What would you have, dear lady?—who for love
Did ask the world that from its course it move?

XL

Well, now they know! the world's malicious arms
Like snakes stretch out, like pistons batter down.
Toward us the missiles of a thousand harms
Are sped; our names delight the leering town.
Corrupt Don Juans of the midnight mart
To their lean spouses mouth our infamy.
Wantons,—whose sins, of flesh and not of heart,
Leave them unscathed,—prove virtue, passing by.
Ah, could we flee the world's whole vile intent!
Might we but face it,—bid it do its worst!
Yet vain the flight, and vain the argument.
For the world's baseness are we made accursed.
O love, bow down! Weep for the people's sin!
The world, the flesh, the devil, always win!

XLI

What Beatrice was, so much you are
To me now wandering with an exile's eyes
In regions whence no road to paradise
Mounts, and the solace glimmers of no star.
There stretch between us gulfs of many a war;
The ancient hills to sunder us arise.
And yet I crave, from Fate that all denies,
You near in dream, who are in truth so far. . . .
"Though all the powers that thwart your life and
mine
Thereto consent, yet can I never be
Your Beatrice. I can never shine
Pale, starry in your heaven: nay, unto me
One lot alone my stormy Fates assign—
To leave you,—or to clasp you utterly!"

XLII

What! shall all thwartings of malignant chance
Set any bar to this impassioned trust?
I will assail these gates of circumstance
And break their iron hinges to the dust.
Nay! are you pallid in the eye of the sun?
Do cold winds blow you from the midmost fire?
Or does the journey ere 'tis well begun
Speak with less eager lure to your desire?
Your look corrodes the metal of my heart.
Are we then tainted with a pallid cast
Of ghostly moonlight? All the foes that start
From ambush do not fright me as this last,
This sudden web of weakness round us grown. . . .
One gate we cannot storm. It is our own. . . .

XLIII

Pale star whose light is dearer than all days,—
Whose beam I can approach but to eclipse,—
Whose glow I can but darken when your praise
In half-unconscious singing stirs my lips,—
Propitious do I deem the leagues of night
That sunder me from regions where you are.
Ere I would quench one glad ray of your light,
I would that you were still my unknown star.
When in the future days I draw not nigh
And mar no more calm skies where you are set,
Think not my night of memory has gone by;—
And, silent star, let not your heart forget.—
Let sometime, somewhere, one clear midnight be
When you revisit this dark troubled sea.

XLIV

When men no longer hear the sunrise-hail
Of Cytherea from her sapphire bays,—
When troubadour-romance grows ghastly pale
In death, and love has come on doubtful days,—
When harlots walk the streets enticing lust,
And dull convenience seals the marriage bond,
And love scarce knows itself from friendly trust,
And restless hearts strain toward some fresh be-
yond,—
In such an hour, vex not with idle blame
The wreck of two, adrift where windy moods
Trouble the deep. Look inward! let the flame
Reveal if moths have spared your treasured goods.
And he whose hopes are bright and sure, alone
Let him take up the first accusing stone.

XLV

A world of beauty and a reign of law—
A glimpse of life's obscure authentic lord—
A link from mote to planet,—these with awe
The saint and lover crave, in deep accord.
Yet must the lover ofttimes turn aside
From where the saint, sure of his truth, would bound
Powers that, beyond known confines circling wide,
The unproved dominance of his dream confound.
Sometimes across the vastness of free sky,
Beyond the orbit of life's charted world,
A wandering spectre of the dark goes by—
A flaming comet out of chaos hurled:—
And wise men doubt their wisdom, as that light
Plunges unknown down chasms of boundless night. . . .

XLVI

There is a love that bursts all hindering bars,
And soars on pinions of authentic might
To glad communion with its sister-stars,
Needing no guidance save its own pure light.
But ere it break the prison of its fears,
Some kinship with the heavens must touch its soul,—
Or, past the wreckage of the shattered years,
It shall drift alien where calm splendors roll. . . .
There is a love born of an exile's heart,—
That shares not in love's universal breath,—
That craves not all life's beauty, but one part
From the rest sundered. And its way is death.
Yet as through night its dying gleam sweeps by,
It mocks the earth,—it, pilgrim of the sky.

XLVII

Seldom the powers of heaven or hell declare
To strangers, meeting, of their rank and name.
The great archangel hosts no aureoles wear,
And Satan's minions prance ungirt of flame.
In vesture undemonstrative they come
And stand like mighty shadows at the gate,
Their eyes subdued, their eloquent voices dumb,
Their hands concealed that hold such turns of fate.
Greet thou the stranger! give him of thy best,
As fits the pilgrim of an unknown day.
Then when thy board is emptied of its guest,
And o'er the hills that vast form stalks away,
Evening, mayhap, across thy door shall fall
Ere thou know sure what garments swept thy hall.

XLVIII

The clouds that steal across the sun of June
Are swift; and out of them the sun comes free.
The mists that drift beneath the flying moon
Reveal new brightness of her wizardry.
Not so the shadows that on the spirit fall,
Moving like torrents that wind the mountain-steep.
Down from the slopes they bear beyond recall
Earth and flowers; their pathway is graven deep.
They wear the iron rock; they change the hills;
The slopes are torn; the peaks fall; the vales flood wide.
And when the waters cease, and sound of rills
Remains, the battle's echo, down the mountain-side,
Passers-by shall marvel, in far-off days—
"Here lie forever the torrent's ancient ways!"

XLIX

There is a sickness in my channelled blood,—
Not of the spirit or the mind alone,
Outlasting far the dominance of a mood,
Eating corrosive into flesh and bone.
And what shall medicine this mortal ill
I know not, nor the surgeons truly know.
They tap and peer and pry their foolish fill,—
But still the dizzy humors ebb and flow.
And yet I somehow feel that did you lay
Your hand upon my heart and bid it beat,
There might come back my youth's unwearied day,
And all the world-paths call my healèd feet.
For in a world where soul and body mesh,
Surely so much the spirit may mould the flesh?

L

I needs must know that in the days to come
No child that from our Summer sprang shall be
To give our voices when the lips are dumb
That lingering breath of immortality.
Nay, all our longing compassed not such hope,
Nor did we, in our flame-shot passagings,
Push the horizon of our visions' scope
To regions of these far entangled things.
I knew not such desire. But now I know.—
O perfect body! O wild soul a-flower!
We, wholly kindled by life's whitest glow,
Turned barren from our life-commanding hour. . . .
Now while I dream, sweetness of that desire
Lies on my heart like veils of parching fire. . . .

LI

What if some lover in a far-off Spring,
Down the long passage of a hundred years,
Should breathe his longing through the words I sing—
And close the book, dazed by a woman's tears?
Does it mean aught to you that such might be? . . .
Ah! we far-seekers! . . . Solely thus were proved
From dream to deed the souls of you and me;—
Thus only were it real that we had loved.
Grey ghosts blown down the desolate moors of time!
Poor wanderers, lost to any hope of rest!
Joined by the measure of a faltering rhyme!
Sundered by deep division of the breast!—
Sundered by all wherein we both have part;
Joined by the far-world seeking of each heart.

LII

This is a record of what has not been,
Is not, and never while time lasts can be.
It is a tale of lights down rain-gusts seen,—
Of midnight argent mad moon-archery.
Ah, life that vexes all men plagued us most!
And made us motes in winds that blew from far,—
Credulous of the whispers of a ghost,—
Fain of the light of some long-quenchèd star.
What were you that I loved you? What was I
That I perturbed you? Shapes of restless sleep!
A shadow from a cloud that hurried by,—
A ripple of great powers that stirred the deep.
And we, too supple for life's storms to break,
Writhed at a dream's touch, for a shadow's sake!

LIII

There are strange shadows fostered of the moon,
More numerous than the clear-cut shade of day. . . .
Go forth, when all the leaves whisper of June,
Into the dusk of swooping bats at play,—
Or go into that late November dusk
When hills take on the noble lines of death,
And on the air the faint astringent musk
Of rotting leaves pours vaguely troubling breath.—
Then shall you see shadows whereof the sun
Knows nothing,—aye, a thousand shadows there
Shall leap and flicker and stir and stay and run,
Like petrels of the changing foul or fair,—
Like ghosts of twilight, of the moon, of him
Whose homeland lies past each horizon's rim. . . .

LIV

Across the shaken bastions of the year
March drives his windy chariot-wheels of cold.
Somewhere, they tell me, Spring is waiting near. . . .
But all my heart is with things grey and old:—
Reliques of other Aprils, that are blown
Recklessly up and down the barren earth;
Mine the dull grasses by the Winter mown,
And the chill echoes of forgotten mirth.
Spring comes, but not for me. I know the sign
And feel it alien. I am of an age
That passes. All the blossoms that were mine
Lie trampled now beneath December's rage.
Ye children of the Spring,—may life be sweet!
For me, the world crumbles beneath my feet.

LV

They brought me tidings; and I did not hear
More than a fragment of the words they said.
Their further speech died dull upon my ear;
For my rapt spirit otherwhere had fled—
Fled unto you in other times and places.
Old memories winged about me in glad flight.
I saw your lips of longing and delight,—
Your grave glad eyes beyond their chattering faces.
I saw a world where you have been to me
More than the sun, more than the wakening wind.
I saw a brightness that they could not see.
And yet I seemed as smitten deaf and blind.
I heard but fragments of the words they said.
Life wanes. The sunlight darkens. You are dead.

LVI

Out of the dusk into whose gloom you went,
Answer me, tell me, why you chose to go?
Why did you seek that far-strewn firmament?
Was loneliness not keen enough below?
Did some old wrong affright you? Some new ill?
Did one more bloom that lured you turn to dust?
What spur could goad that lovely weary will,
What hopeless calm, what storm of shaken trust?
Across the giant waste of this unknown
Must I forever send my questionings?
Had you no word to leave me for my own
Before you went? Must my imaginings
Deem you forgot?—Or did you heart foretell
That time's whole later hush would speak farewell?

LVII

Now from the living fountains of my thought
Spring streams of comfort, crystalline and mild,
To cool the wound the sudden stroke has wrought
And bid my heart in peace be reconciled.
My spirit whispers—"From this meteor flown,
Draw knowledge of the stars, now all is done.
Assign it station in some system known,
Part of the ordered brightness round the sun."
Good counsel!—reconcile, transmute, remould
To earth's conglomerate mass this unconfined
Pilgrim of sky,—or label it, grown cold,
To edify a chaos-fearing mind? . . .
Love, love, I keep memorial of you! Nay!—
Unsolved, bright, lonely, till my Judgment Day!